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SUBJECT: NATO DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL BRIEFS DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY ON VISIT TO ISRAEL

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a November 24 briefing to the diplomatic corps held at the Canadian Embassy, NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero described positive meetings with GOI interlocutors in which both NATO and the GOI expressed interest in enhancing the NATO-Israel relationship. (Note: Canada serves as the NATO contact country in Israel.) Amb. Bisogniero said GOI officials did not raise potential Israeli membership in NATO, which was a marked difference from his visit in 2007. However, GOI officials continue to express interest in a status of forces agreement (SOFA) with NATO. Amb. Bisogniero described Iran as a "leitmotif" in all his conversations; other topics included NATO's review of the Strategic Concept, Israeli participation in Operation Active Endeavour, NATO's role in Afghanistan, and potential Israeli participation in NATO exercises and training opportunities. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Amb. Bisogniero noted that this was his second visit to Israel, the first taking place in October 2007. During this latest visit, he met with FM Lieberman, Deputy Minister of Defense Vilnai, members of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, and IDF Deputy Chief of the General Staff Major General Gantz, and engaged in strategic staff talks with the Israeli interagency hosted by MFA Deputy Director General for Western Europe Naor Gilon.

¶3. (SBU) Overall, Bisogniero characterized the visit as "very positive," noting that Israel is often the first of the Mediterranean Dialogue (Med D) partners to take advantage of available NATO tools. He said Israel was the first Med D partner to develop an Individual Cooperation Program (ICP), which is currently in its second revision. Bisogniero said both NATO and Israel interlocutors indicated a willingness to "do more" with regard to the relationship. He noted, however, that there was little mention of potential Israeli membership in NATO -- a decided difference from his visit in ¶2007.

FM Lieberman

¶4. (SBU) Amb. Bisogniero described his meeting with FM Lieberman as positive, noting that Lieberman invited the NATO Secretary General to visit Israel, and plans to visit NATO Headquarters in early 2010. Bisogniero said Lieberman spoke extensively about Iran, noting a "January 1 deadline" but neglecting to offer an explanation of what such a deadline entailed. Bisogniero reiterated NATO's support for the P5 1 and IAEA efforts. He said Lieberman argued the international community "missed a chance" to affect change after the Iranian regime's brutal crackdown following the June national

elections. Bisogniero said Lieberman asked rhetorically what expanded role NATO might play in the Middle East, but did not offer any suggestions. Bisogniero noted this issue played a more prevalent role during his visit in 2007; by and large, a Middle East regional role for NATO was not discussed during this latest visit.

15. (SBU) Amb. Bisogniero said Lieberman also was very interested in NATO's relationship with Russia, especially within the context of NATO enlargement and the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. Bisogniero said Lieberman was seized with the issue of confronting Islamic radicalism and extremism, and charged NATO to do more globally in that regard. Bisogniero pointed to NATO's role in Afghanistan, stressing NATO "cannot fail." Lieberman acknowledged NATO in Afghanistan, but said NATO must do more in this "clash of civilizations."

Strategic Staff Talks

16. (SBU) Amb. Bisogniero said the strategic staff talks included representatives from the MFA, MOD, IDF, and Prime Minister's Office. Bisogniero said all GOI interlocutors expressed interest in expanded NATO-GOI relations, and stressed the need for the North Atlantic Council (NAC) to meet regularly with the seven Med D partners, as well as resuming the Atlantic Policy Advisory Group (APAG) -- which Bisogniero explained had been postponed following Operation Cast Lead. Amb. Bisogniero said the "NAC plus 7" meetings with the Med D partners are a key element from NATO's perspective, as NATO must be viewed as attempting to assist

all Med D partners. He added that gathering the six Arab partners and Israel around the table to discuss sensitive issues was an important goal for NATO. Representatives from the PM's Office noted a planned visit to Brussels by PM Netanyahu tentatively scheduled for March 2010, and discussed the possibility of Netanyahu addressing the NAC.

17. (SBU) Amb. Bisogniero said the strategic staff talks reviewed several areas of NATO-GOI cooperation. He said the NATO Senior Politico-Military Group on Proliferation (SGP) had met with the GOI on several occasions, including most recently in September 2009. Bisogniero said the GOI had been invited to attend a NATO nonproliferation seminar in Warsaw in December, and noted plans for the NATO Assistant Secretary for Defense Planning to visit Israel in 2010. He said both NATO and GOI interlocutors expressed interest in enhanced contacts with respect to counterterrorism cooperation and intelligence exchanges. Other potential areas of increased NATO-GOI cooperation include civil emergency planning and crisis management through the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC). Bisogniero said the GOI remains very interested in enhanced cooperation with the North Atlantic Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA), especially with regard to maintenance for its Patriot arsenal.

18. (SBU) Amb. Bisogniero said GOI interlocutors raised the possibility of a status of forces agreement (SOFA) between NATO and Israel. He explained that the issue of a SOFA is sensitive -- Israel is the most prepared of the Med D partners to conclude a SOFA with NATO. However, several NATO Allies have expressed reservations regarding a SOFA with Israel without formalizing one with the other Med D countries. Bisogniero said the current iteration of Israel's ICP includes language to identify alternatives to the SOFA in the interim.

19. (SBU) Amb. Bisogniero said the strategic staff talks addressed some of the practical arrangements regarding the GOI's participation in NATO's Operation Active Endeavour (OAE) in the Mediterranean Sea. He noted that the GOI had expressed willingness to make its sole participating naval vessel available earlier than anticipated -- as early as January/February 2010 -- which demonstrates how serious the GOI takes its participation. The strategic staff talks also discussed potential Israeli participation in NATO's Crisis

Management Exercise (CMX) 09, as well as potential training opportunities and counter-piracy cooperation. Bisogniero said he encouraged the GOI to express its views regarding the Strategic Concept review during an upcoming seminar in Oslo.

Knesset

¶10. (SBU) Amb. Bisogniero described his meeting with members from the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee as positive. He said committee members questioned whether NATO was truly committed to the effort in Afghanistan, and suggested that NATO might find itself in a situation similar to Israel's following Operation Cast Lead and the Goldstone Report -- especially regarding civilian casualties. Bisogniero described to the members NATO's strong policy on avoiding civilian casualties. He said the committee members also asked about Iran, and the Strategic Concept review.

IDF

¶11. (SBU) Amb. Bisogniero said IDF Deputy Chief of the General Staff MG Gantz described a stark global situation, noting a "third world war" by Islamic radicals against Western civilization. Bisogniero emphasized to MG Gantz the need to prioritize its ICP goals; according to Bisogniero, MG Gantz said he would try to provide this by the end of the year. Bisogniero said MG Gantz also discussed Iran, and asked how Israel might help NATO in Afghanistan -- while the provision of troops is highly unlikely, perhaps Israel can assist in other ways such as sharing its experience in countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

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